

World Conference on Prevention of Family Violence 2005

# **The FaithLink Project: Promoting Collaboration between Secular Agencies and Spiritual Communities**

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# FaithLink: What it Is

**Mission:** Spiritual/religious communities and service providers working together to prevent domestic violence and to provide healing and hope to all those affected by it.

FaithLink interprets the term 'religious/spiritual communities' broadly to include a wide variety of religious traditions and spiritually based groups. As capacity allows and as doors open we will expand the work to additional religious/spiritual traditions. We are presently working within the Christian, Jewish and Cambodian Buddhist communities and have connections to the Hindu, Muslim, Ismaili and Aboriginal communities.

# Beginnings: 1998-2000

FaithLink developed from:

- The desire by key religious leaders and secular family violence service agency leaders to establish a systems-wide co-ordinated response to family violence; and
- Recognition that a broad community response required in involvement of religious/spiritual communities

# First Steps

- **A small committee is formed to consider how religious/spiritual communities can become involved**
- **A workshop is organized and members of domestic violence services sector and spiritual leaders are invited. Potential is recognized.**
- **A name – FaithLink - for the initiative is chosen**
- **Original committee develops into a Steering Committee of 30+ members, including:**
  - **Leaders from Christian, Jewish and Khmer Buddhist religious traditions**
  - **A member of the Ishmael community**
  - **Women's shelters**
  - **Counselling and family violence intervention services**
  - **Private counsellors**
  - **Interested individuals**

# **Growing Pains: 2002-2004**

- **Work begins within the Christian community**
- **Part-time co-ordinator hired**
- **Work expands to the Jewish community**

# Looking Forward: 2005 and Beyond

## Five areas of focus:

1. Raising awareness within religious/spiritually-based communities about the issue of family violence, building response capacity and providing resources that facilitate their taking preventive action.
2. Raising awareness among secular service providers of the importance of the spiritual to those clients who access their services and who come from religious/spiritual communities.
3. Building working relationships between spiritual leaders and service providers.
4. Conducting relevant research.
5. Caring for the caregiver: Opportunities to develop self-care practices.

# What FaithLink Does

- **FaithLink works with Religious/spiritually-based communities to create protocols for responding to domestic abuse**
- **Through workshops and Manuals, enhances the capacity to assess for abuse within relationships for those who offer counsel to couples planning to marry.**
- **Sponsors conferences and Consultations**
- **Develops and distributes Resource and Activities Manuals to spiritual/religious communities**
- **Offers Spirituality Awareness Workshops to service providers**
- **Raises awareness about domestic abuse through presentations to various groups**

# **What FaithLink Does: Bridge Building**

**Seeks opportunities to connect members of spiritually-based communities with service providers in collaborative work to**

- **enhance the healing process for those affected by violence.**
  - **For example, a list of spiritual leaders who understand the issue of family violence and who are prepared to accept referrals from shelters of clients who desire counsel re: placing their abusive experience within the context of their belief system.**

# What FaithLink Does: Self-Care

**Recognizing that domestic violence professionals are personally impacted by their work and that spiritual traditions have evolved practices that can help professionals deal with the stress of their work**

- **FaithLink offers opportunities for the enhancement of self-care practices with the aim of:**
  - **Decreasing the effects of vicarious trauma**
  - **Enhancing the quality of service to clients by lessening burnout and staff turnover**

# What FaithLink Does: Research

- **Relevant research that seeks to add to the family violence knowledge base, particularly as it relates to the interface between the spiritual and service providers. Including:**
- **A three year project that will:**
  - **Examine the knowledge of, attitudes towards and responses to domestic violence expressed by spiritual in both urban and rural areas of the province; and**
  - **Examine the knowledge of, attitude towards an responses to the importance of the spiritual by secular service providers.**

# Why we do what we do: Domestic Violence and Religious Communities

- Research is confirming the long held assumption that family violence is as prevalent within religious/spiritually-based communities as it is within the general population.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Women of religious/spiritual communities often remain in abusive relationships longer.
- Spiritual leaders are called upon to both intervene in domestic disputes and to counsel those who have been abusive within intimate relationships.<sup>[2]</sup>
- Victims of violence, however, report the counsel they receive from spiritual leaders has not always been helpful to them.

<sup>[1]</sup> Nason-Clark, N. *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky. 1997. Beaman-Hall, L. & N. Nason-Clark. *Partners or Protagonists : The Transition House Movement and Conservative Churches*. *Affilia*. 12(2), Summer, 1997, 176-196.

Jewish Women International. "Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community." Pamphlet. Jewish Women International. Washington.

<sup>[2]</sup> Nason-Clark, N. *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, Ky., 1997.

# **Why we do what we do: Religious Communities have a Significant Role**

## **These communities:**

- **have access to individuals:**
  - **from across the life span who may be particularly vulnerable to abuse, e.g., children, the elderly, the disabled, members of minority cultures, women and teenaged girls.**
  - **Spiritual leaders can take preventive and practical action. They can:**
    - **Educate**
    - **Ensure safety**
    - **Make information available**
    - **Be alert for signs of abuse**
- **Can respond to disclosures of abuse in ways that place the victim's safety as the first priority**
- **Can facilitate the accessing of specialized resources by congregants**

# Why We Do What We Do: Beliefs Influence

**Beliefs may significantly influence:**

- **How conflicts are defined and resolved.**<sup>[1]</sup>
- **Relational roles, responsibilities, boundaries, models set for children may be defined**
- **Children's future opportunities (e.g., education, marriage)**

<sup>[1]</sup> Ware et al. p.71-72

# Why we do what we do: Beliefs Matter

- **Beliefs (such as beliefs about repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, suffering, roles, obedience and obligation) become important in**
  - **The decision to disclose the abuse, when and to whom;**
  - **Whether or not to leave the relationship and if and when to reconcile;**
  - **Whether to access secular community services;**
  - **The extent to which the sanctions of the courts are accepted;**
  - **The degree of commitment given to secularly based intervention regimes.**

[1] Ware et al. p.71-72.

# Why we do what we do: Fear Hinders Accessing Resources

Fears<sup>[1]</sup> include:

- that the importance of their spirituality may be underestimated or not validated;
- that their beliefs will be misunderstood, under appreciated or ridiculed;
- that it may not be possible to accommodate spiritual practices and/or religious requirements
  - Diet
  - Privacy
  - Daily rituals

<sup>[1]</sup> Silverstone; Nason-Clark. P.16-17.

# Why we do what we do: Trauma and the Spiritual

We are also becoming increasingly aware of the interplay between trauma and the spiritual.<sup>[1]</sup>

- Abuse strikes at the heart of their selfhood, self-concept and sense of the sacred.<sup>[2]</sup>
- Victims may interpret the abuse as ‘divine’ abandonment or punishment.<sup>[3]</sup>
- Religious practices provide:
  - Spiritual supports, healing, strength
  - A framework for viewing life experiences within a broader perspective
  - A realization of new and different possibilities.

<sup>[1]</sup> Barrett, Mary Jo. “Healing From Trauma: The Quest for Spirituality.” In *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy*. Edited by Froma Walsh. The Guilford Press, New York., 1999.

<sup>[2]</sup> Nason-Clark, p.14

<sup>[3]</sup> Toews, p. 107

# **Acknowledging our Funders**

**FaithLink's Activities and Research have been well-supported:**

- **National Crime Prevention Strategy  
Community Mobilization Program**
- **Alberta Government, through Children's Services**
- **Canadian Women's Foundation**
- **Prairie Action Foundation**
- **Muttart Foundation**
- **Calgary Foundation**
- **Status of Women Canada**
- **Private Donors**

# About the Research

- **The knowledge-building plan**
  - **Survey**
  - **Focus Groups**
  - **Service providers**
  - **Spiritual leader interviews**
- **Part of a piece: The Christian Spiritual Leaders' Survey**

Family violence has attracted a lot of media attention in recent years. In the following questions you are asked to share your own thoughts about this issue – why it occurs, what it means and how the community should respond to it.

16. Some people suggest that the prevalence and severity of family violence has been exaggerated. What is your response to this suggestion? (PLEASE CIRCLE THE RESPONSE THAT SEEMS MOST APPROPRIATE)

(1) I strongly agree      (2) I agree somewhat      (3) I am neutral      (4) I disagree somewhat      (5) I strongly disagree      (9) I am undecided

From the following list of experiences, check [✓] the box which applies to you.	Yes	No	Unsure
1. I have visited a local women's shelter.			
2. I have preached specific messages on wife and child abuse.			
3. I have been involved in a church group that provides support for women who have experienced family violence.			
4. I have been involved in a church group that provides support for men who have experienced family violence.			
5. I have been involved in a church group that provides support for children who have experienced family violence.			
6. I have been involved in a church group that provides support for families who have experienced family violence.			
7. In our faith community's marriage preparation sessions, it is standard practice to raise the issue of violence in relationships.			

Scaled items

Checklist items

Open-ended

In all: 69 Questions, about:

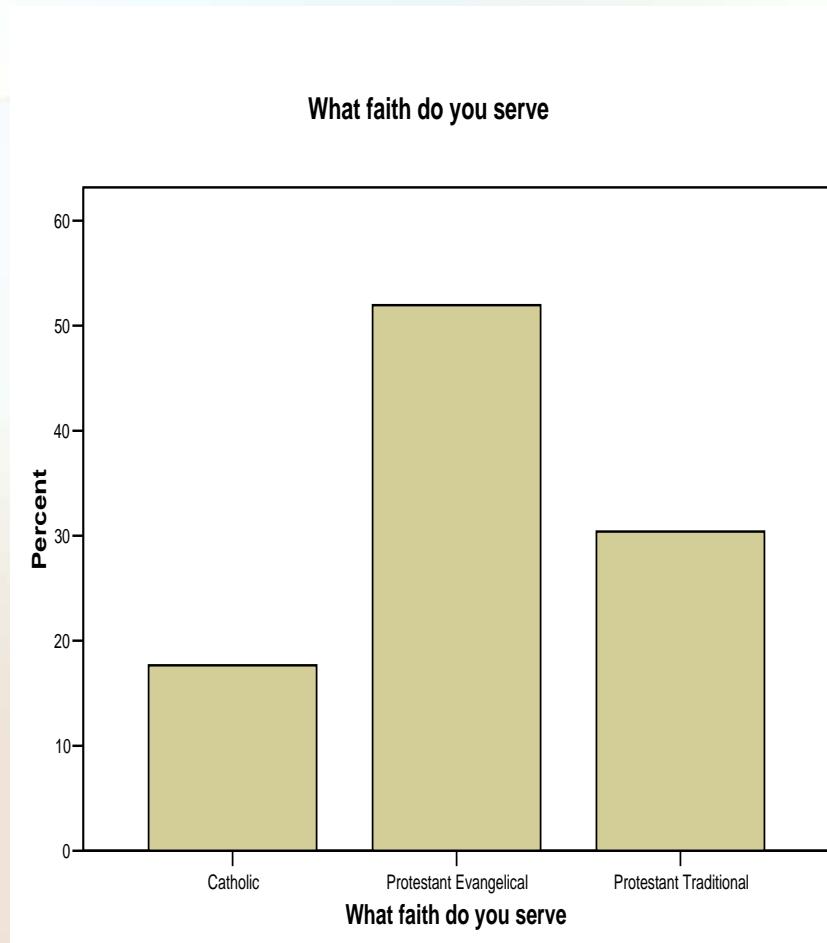
- Work
- Practices
- Knowledge and Attitudes

18. Some people suggest when family violence occurs, the victim has done something to

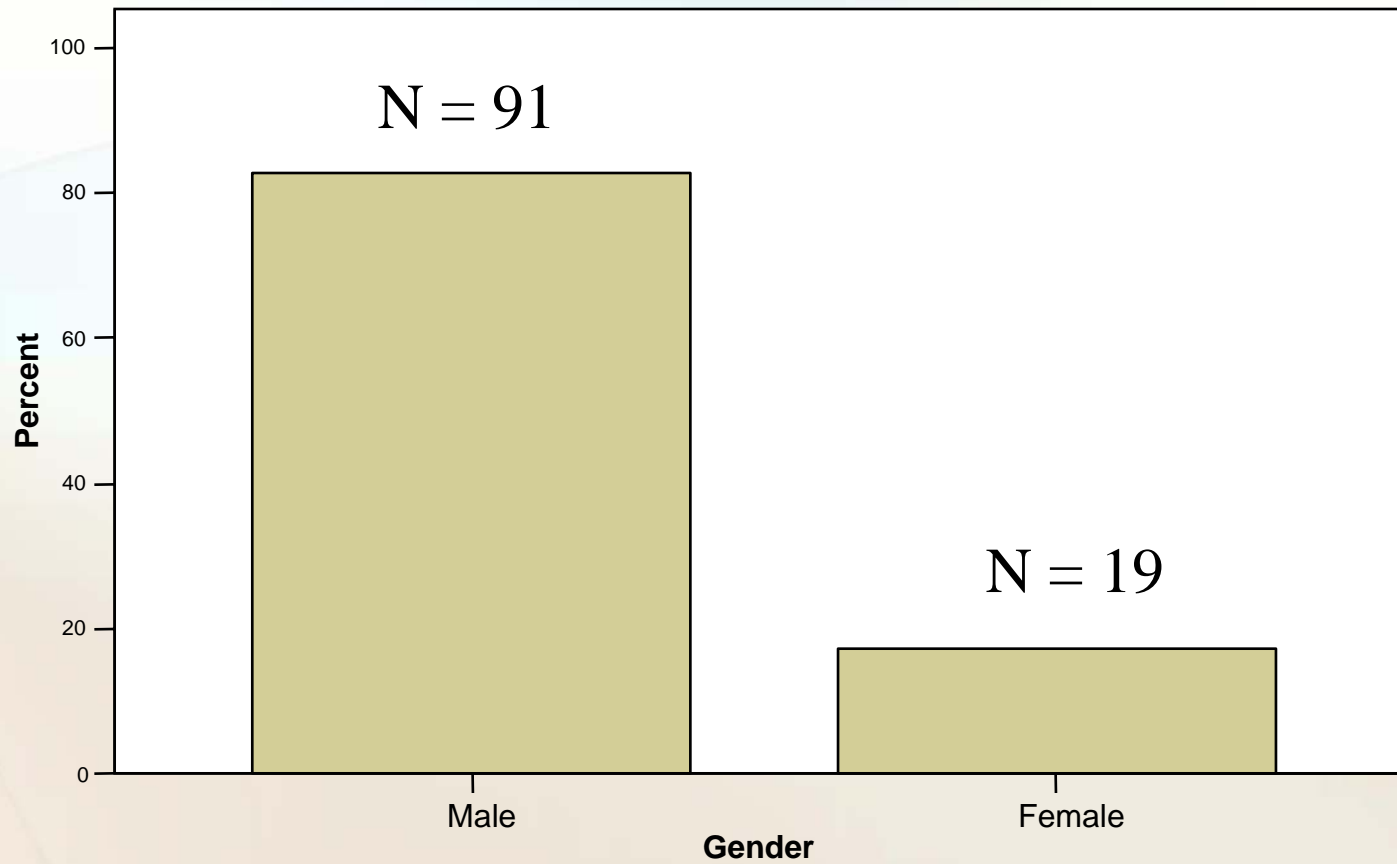
# Sample

- **333 questionnaires sent to Christian Church leaders**
- **114 valid questionnaires returned.**
  - **Return rate: 34%**

# Who Responded?



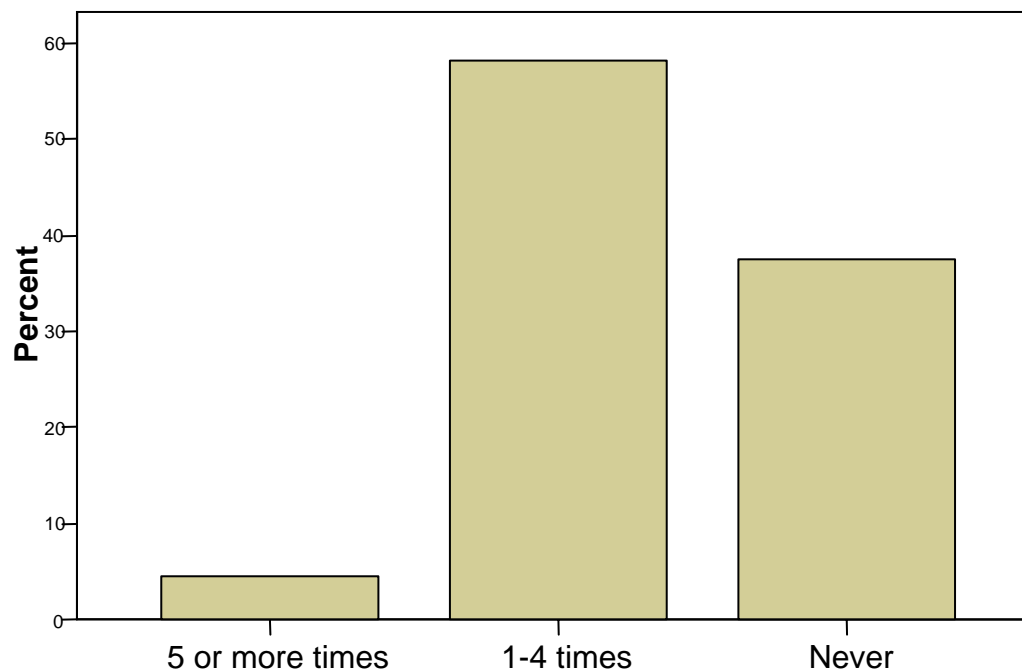
# Gender



# Involvement with DV in Counselling

How frequently, in the past year ...

**A couple reporting violence in their relationship**



# Comfort with Own Response/Skill Level

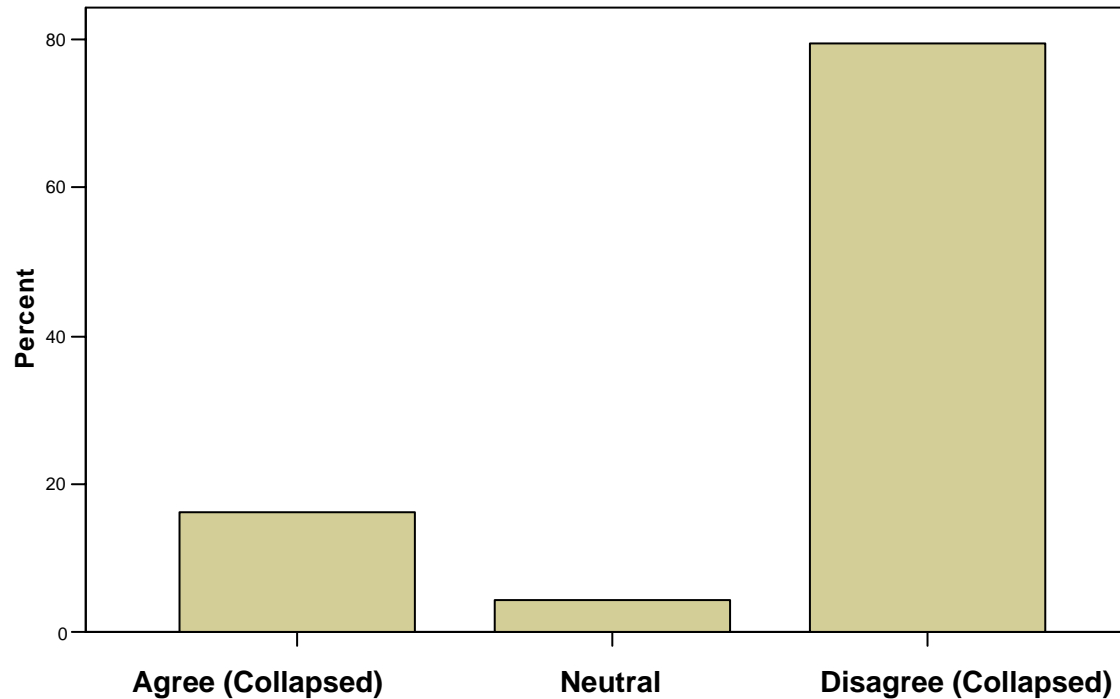
Training in Family Violence				
<u>Confidence in Handling Family Violence Situations</u>	<u>No Training</u>	<u>Some Training</u>	<u>Well-Trained</u>	<u>Total</u>
Not Confident	38% (12)	56% (18)	6% (2)	N = 32
Moderately Confident	12% (6)	66% (35)	22% (11)	N = 50
Very Confident	0%	33% (4)	78% (14)	N = 18
Total				N = 100

# Findings

- **Spiritual Leaders' Knowledge and Attitudes Regarding DV**
- **Spiritual Leaders' Involvement in Working with Family Violence Issues**
- **Spiritual Leaders' Collaboration with others in Responding to DV**

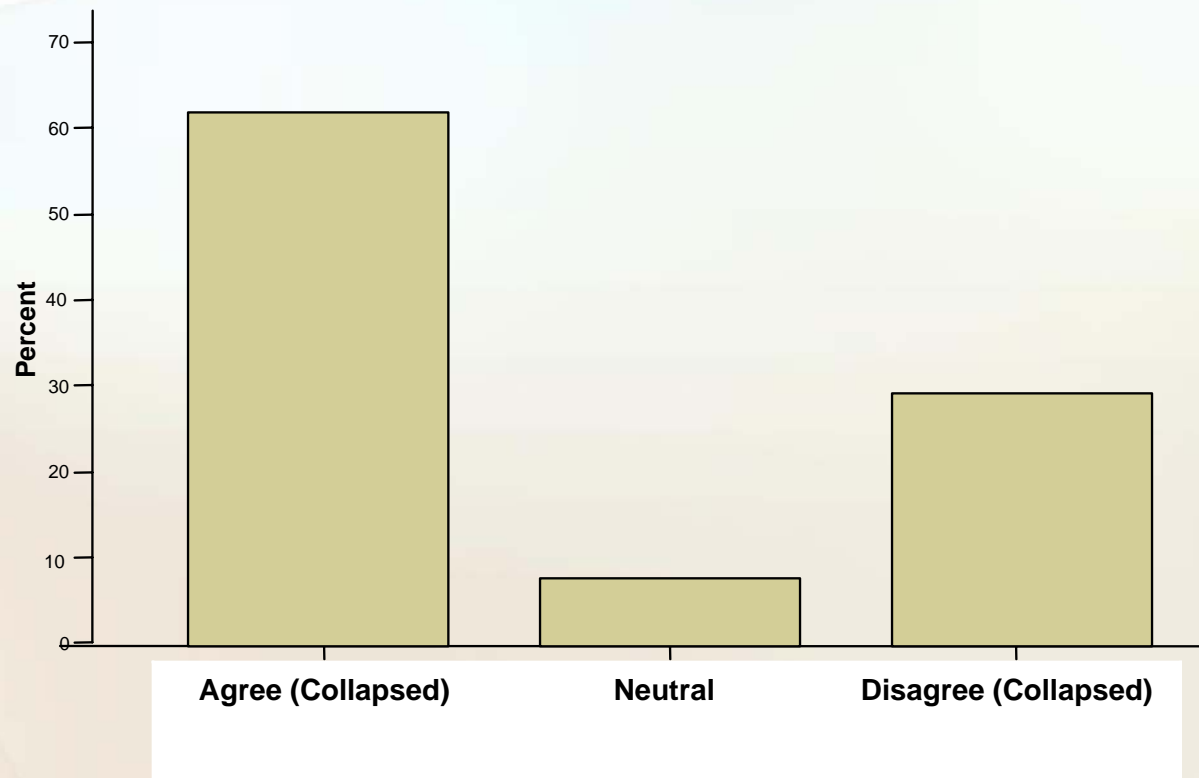
# Spirituality and Violence

Families in faith communities are unlikely to be families experiencing violence



# Violence as Control

Violence against women by men is most often an attempt to control the woman's behavior



# Violence is Control: Open Ended Comments

- It is an issue of control.
- While control is the “presenting” issue I believe there are deeper motivators within the perpetrator.
- I think there are many reasons i.e. alcohol, drugs, pornography, etc.
- Such a suggestion is most often just another excuse to perpetrate and justify abuse. No relationship should have control as an objective. Our task is to advocate and support others in making healthy choices; and as parents to model such behavior (also friends and neighbors).
- It may be but I’m sure its more complex and darker than issues of power and control.

# Importance of Saving Marriage by Faith Served

**In Abusive Marriages, Saving the Marriage is Always the Top Priority**

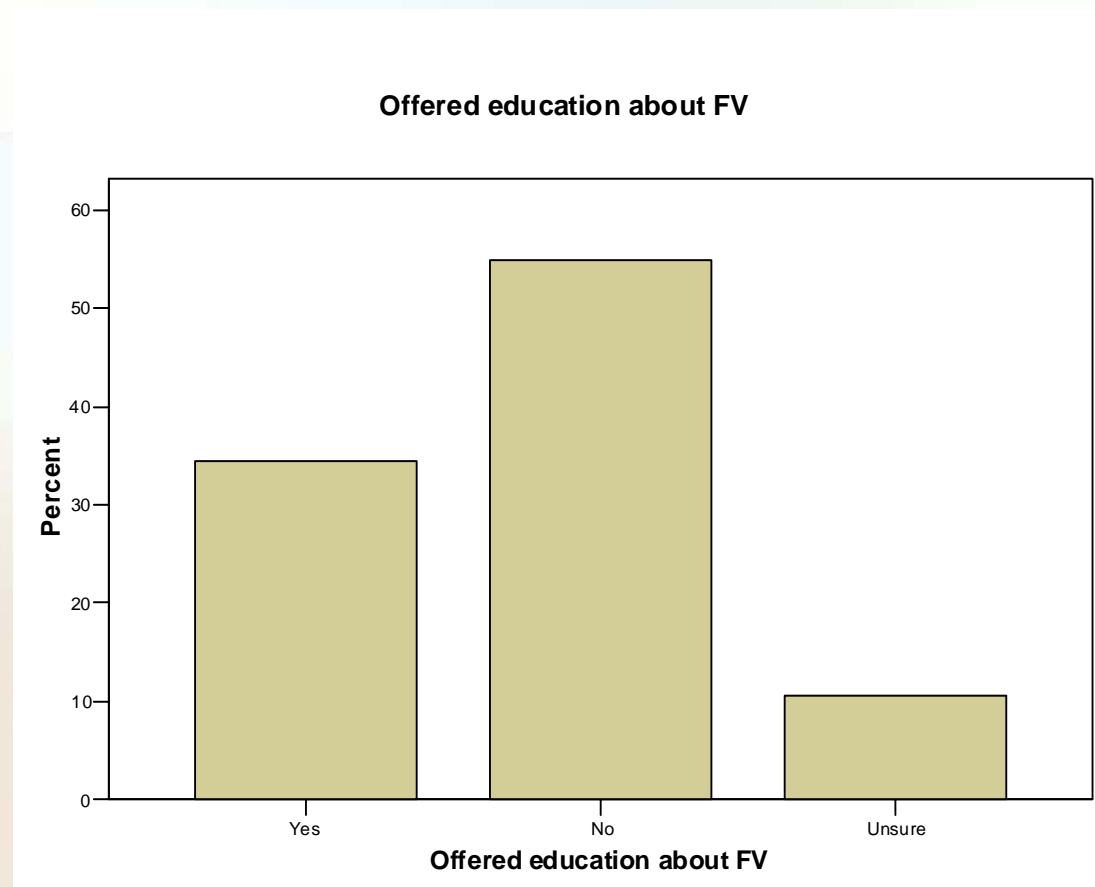
	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Catholic</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>N=18</b>
<b>Protestant Evangelical</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>N=50</b>
<b>Protestant Traditional</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>N=27</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>N=95</b>

**p = .022 (X<sup>2</sup>)**

## Findings (2)

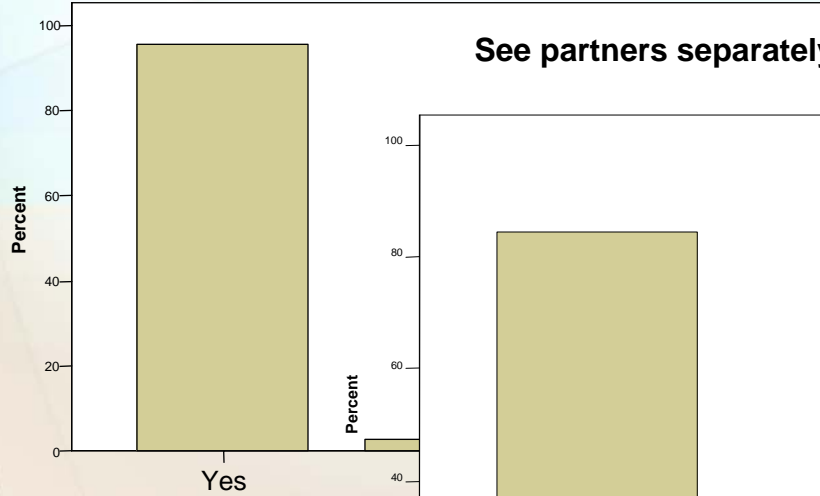
- **Spiritual Leaders' Knowledge and Attitudes Regarding DV**
- **Spiritual Leaders' Involvement in Working with Family Violence Issues**
- **Spiritual Leaders' Collaboration with others in Responding to DV**

# Educating the Spiritual Community

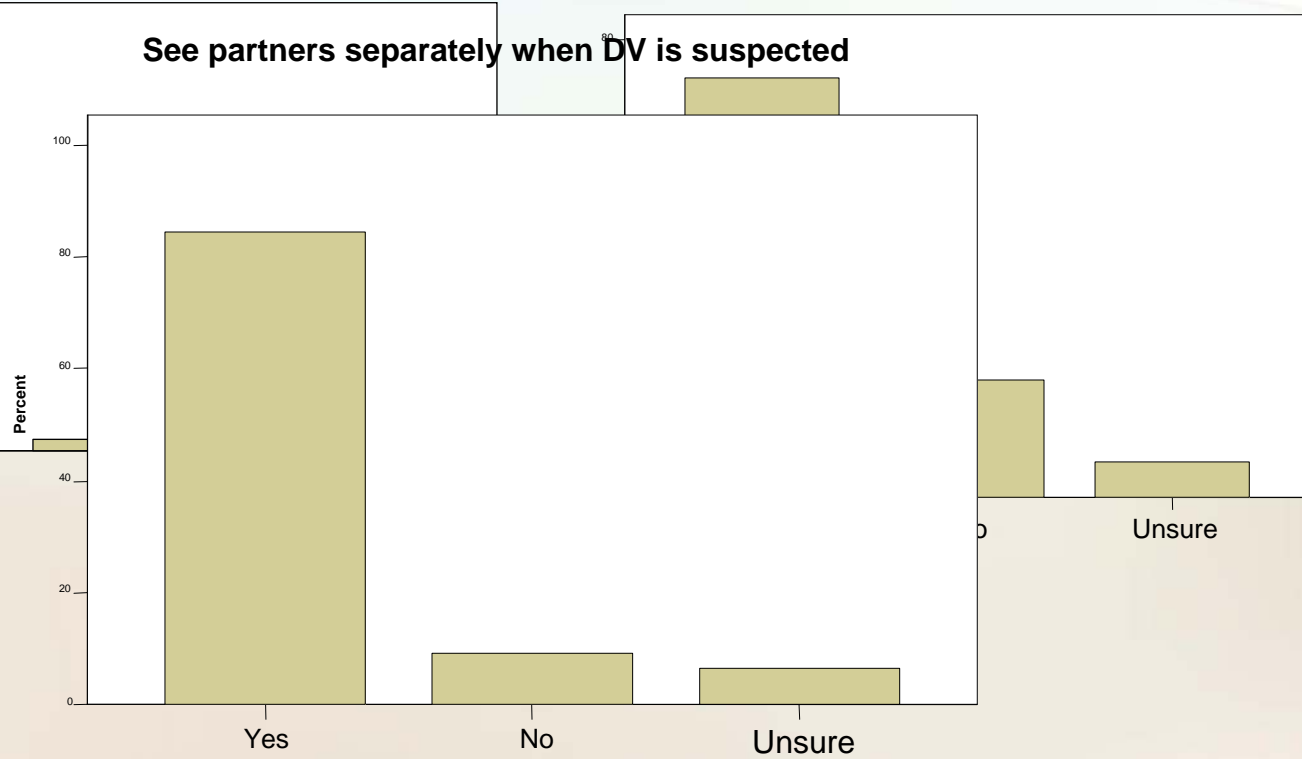


# DV and Pastoral Counselling

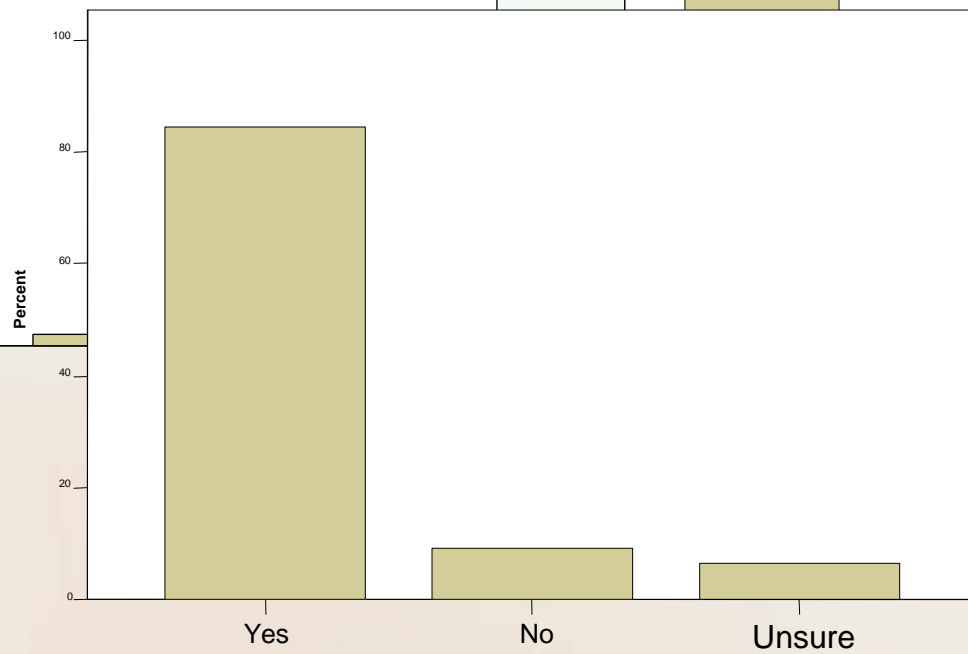
Listen for indicators of DV when counselling



Ask specific questions if DV may be a concern



See partners separately when DV is suspected

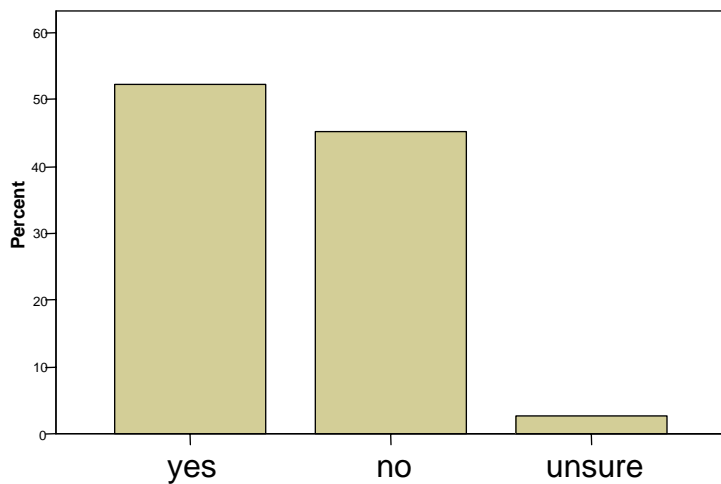


# Findings (3)

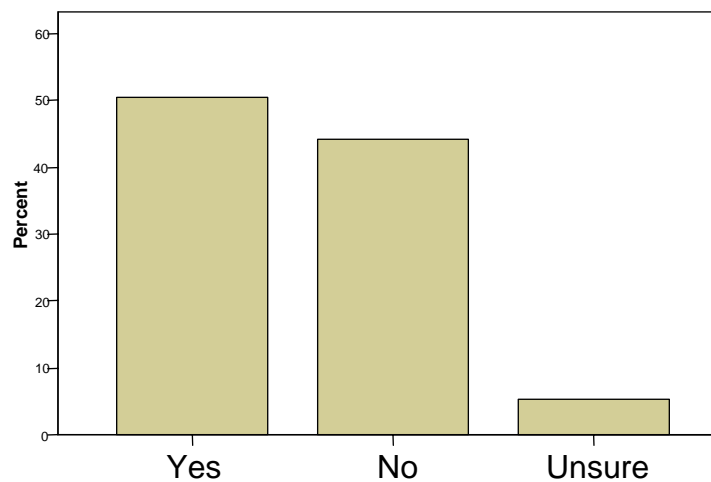
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# Pastoral Counselling: Collegial Support

Talked to other faith leaders about a specific abuse situation

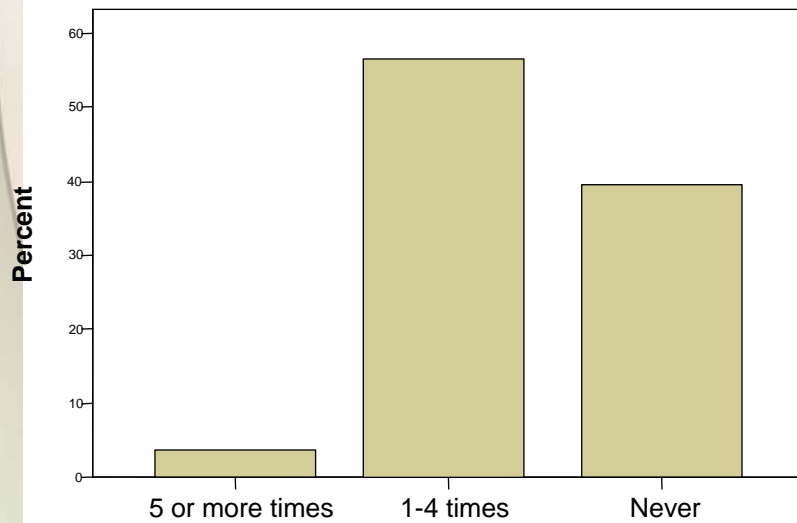


Helped colleague deal with counselling situation involving abuse

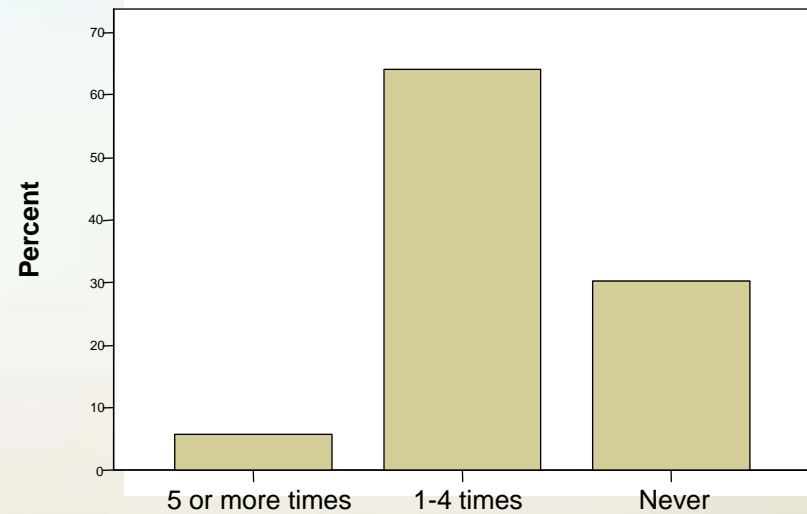


# Use of Consultation and Support

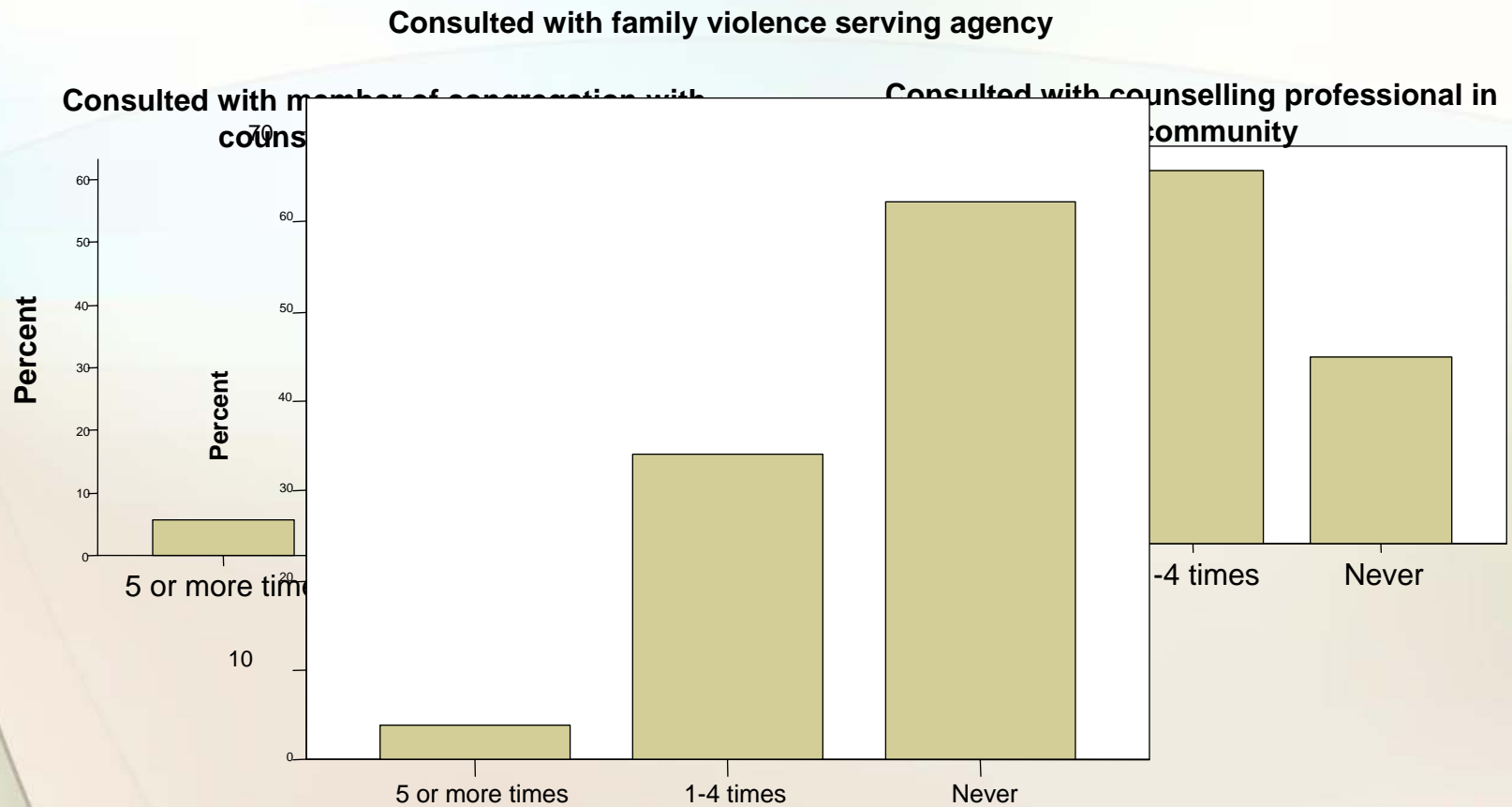
## Handled situations on my own



## Consulted with member of pastoral team

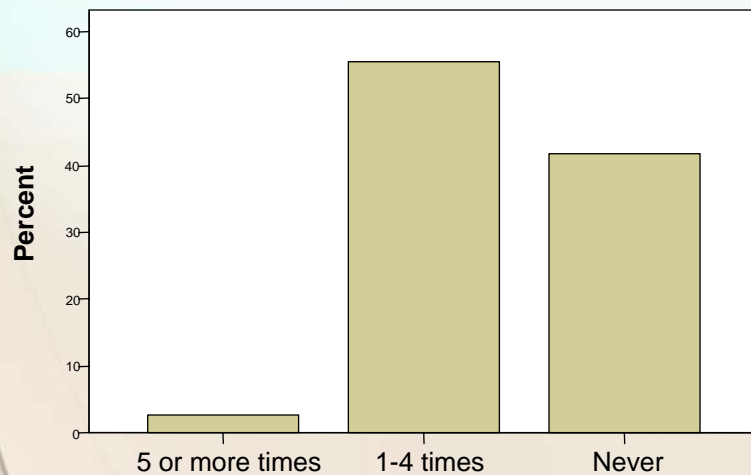


# Use of Consultation and Support

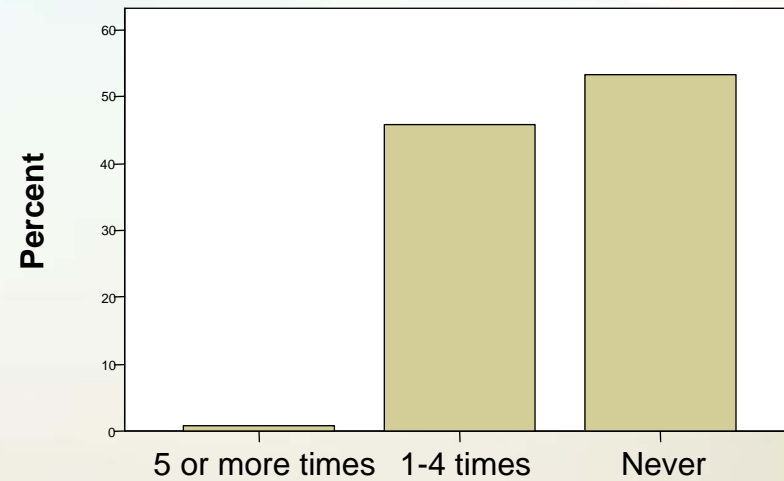


# Referrals to Counsellors

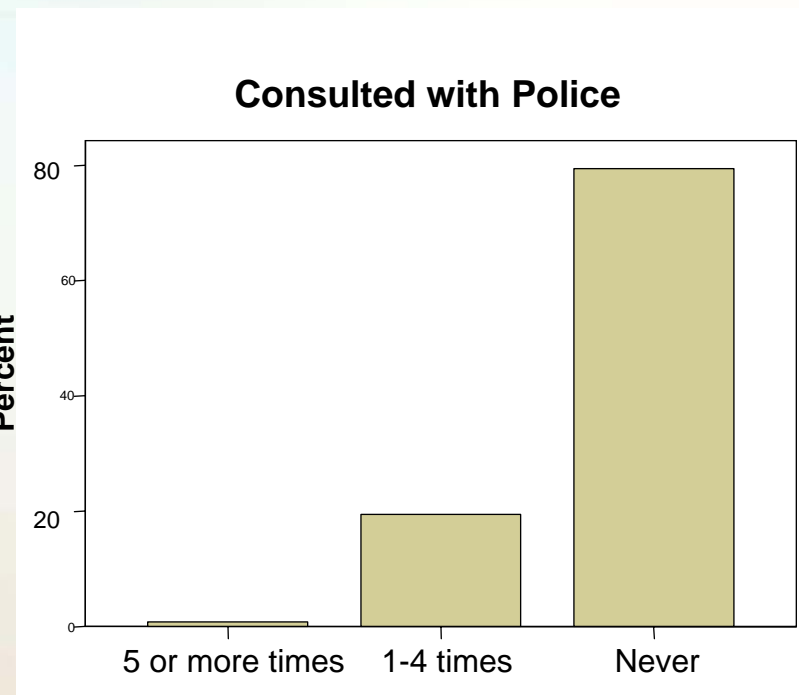
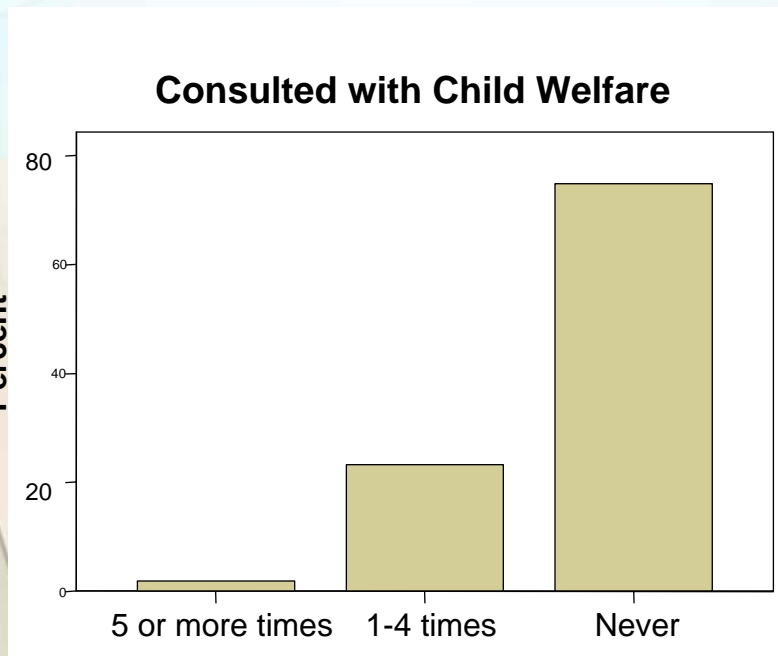
Referred individual/family to counsellor within faith tradition



Referred individual/family to counsellor outside faith tradition

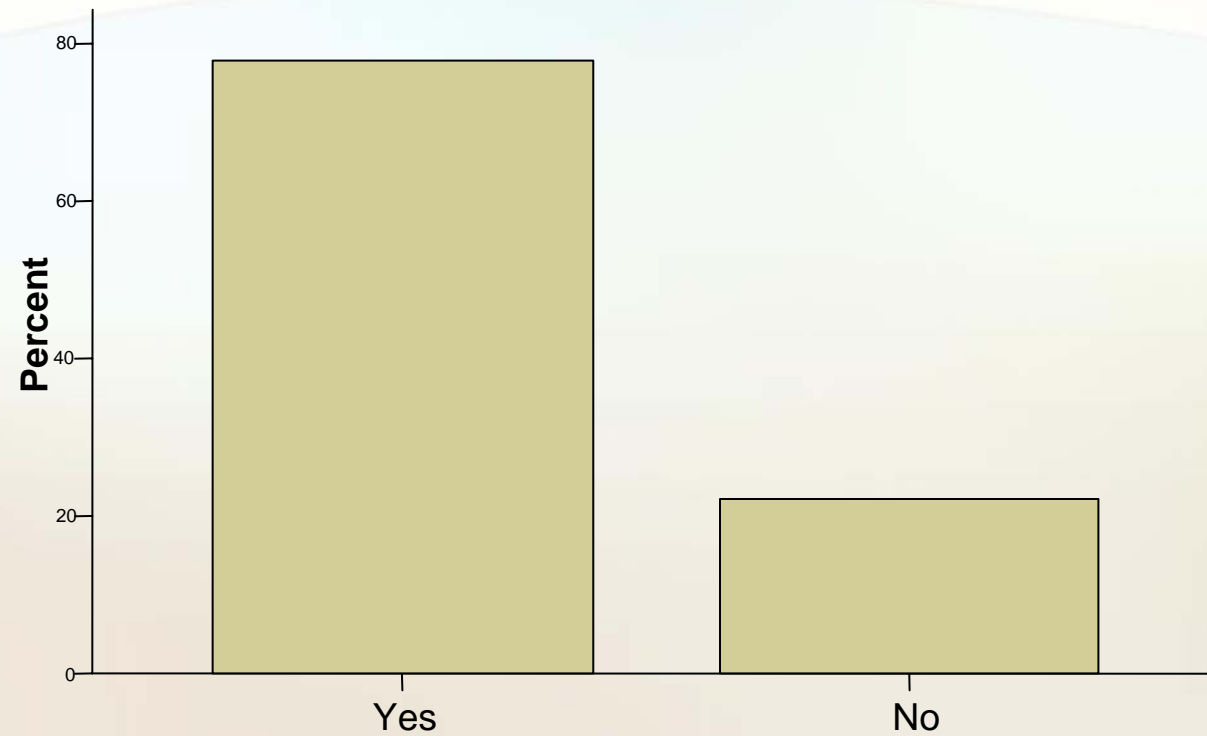


# Referrals to Child Welfare, Police



# Satisfaction with Secular Services

If referred to a secular agency were you satisfied with the result



# Satisfaction: Open Ended Comments

- **There is always a potential conflict or confusion – I realize the limitations placed upon secular agencies. However it is undermining to people’s efforts – they will always tend to go with the less demanding, easier option, no blame, no ‘real consequences’ route – rather than be accountable, responsible, hopeful of change.**
- **Not enough faith dimension involved.**
- **Yes, partly, the couple disengaged.**
- **Generally unsatisfactory but occasionally an exceptional person not typically available.**
- **They were long on educational expertise but short on everyday advice.**
- **I have not had great “success” with referrals, but I’m not sure whether this is due to the constraints in which the professional must work, the diligence of the person being referred, or competence of the professional?**

# Lessons Learned

- **The mistrust that exists between spiritual leaders and service providers is deeper than expected.**
  - **Spiritual leaders prefer to refer those affected by domestic abuse to resources within the faith tradition, other pastoral team members, counsellors within their faith tradition.**
  - **Secular service providers mistrust the competency of spiritual leaders to address issues of family violence.**

## **Lessons Learned (2)**

- **There is a different analysis of the issue**
  - **Secular wisdom places family violence within the context of power and control.**
  - **Spiritual leaders may take a broader perspective on the human condition and include concepts such as sin as causal factors.**

## **Lessons Learned (3)**

- **The importance of having spiritual leaders in the forefront of the work cannot be over-emphasized.**
- **There is also a need for each culture – spiritual communities and the family violence service sector – to understand each other and speak each others' language.**
- **Secular professionals are open to the wisdom found in the religious/spiritual traditions if it is presented from a broad perspective and with a pastoral-care motivation.**

# Lessons Learned (4)

- **The divide between religious/spiritual communities and family violence service agencies can be spanned. It takes:**
  - **Time**
  - **Patience**
  - **Opportunities for discussion of mutual concerns**
  - **Awareness raising on both sides**
  - **Individuals prepared to think and work outside prescribed perspectives. For example ...**

## **For Example:**

- **A secular second stage shelter and the Jewish community, working together, have dedicated one suite of rooms for Jewish abused women and their families.**
- **A Jewish Hadassah women's chapter has taken responsibility for maintaining the suite and for ensuring that it is kosher.**

# The Bottom Line

- **Individuals who espouse spiritual convictions and have experienced abuse should not have to choose between staying within their religious communities and accessing secular services.**
- **We all need to work – from both sides of the divide – to ensure that victims, child witnesses and those who have acted abusively – can access both the deep resources inherent within the spiritual and the expertise that is vested within the domestic services sector.**

# World Conference on Prevention of Family Violence

October 23-26, 2005

## Abstract

### The FaithLink Project: Promoting Collaboration between Secular Agencies and Spiritual Communities

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Women with commitments to spiritual/religious communities are often in a uniquely difficult position if they are subject to domestic violence. Their abuse may not be properly understood by their spiritual communities, while the importance and implications of their spiritual beliefs may not be understood by secular service providers.

Spiritual leaders and secular helpers often do not understand or trust one another, and therefore do not work well together on behalf of abused women. Religious women may be discouraged from accessing services from community agencies; when they do, they may feel an important aspect of who they are is not fully understood.

FaithLink is a unique response to this issue, an organization comprising family violence service providers and spiritual leaders, its purpose being to promote the collaboration needed if spiritually committed abused women are to be well served.

This presentation describes the development and current work of FaithLink, outlining the challenges confronted in its work, effective responses to those challenges, and the kinds of outcomes that can be achieved. FaithLink's work is the focus of ongoing research under the aegis of RESOLVE Alberta, and some preliminary research findings will also be part of the presentation.